

# PERSONAL LANDSCAPE

BERNARD SPENCER  
ROBIN FEDDEN  
LAWRENCE DURRELL  
TERENCE TILLER

NUMBER 1

JANUARY 1942

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## IDEAS ABOUT POEMS.

1. Neither poet nor public is really interested in the poem itself but in aspects of it.
2. The poet is interested in the Personal aspect : the poem as an aspect of himself.
3. The public is interested in the Vicarious aspect; that is to say "the universal application", which is an illusion that grows round a poem once the logical meaning is clear and the syntax ceases to puzzle.
4. This is why good poems get written despite bad poets and why bad publics often choose right.

### MEANWHILE.

the poem itself is there all the time. The sum of these aspects, it is quite different to what the poet and the public imagine it to be. Like a child or a climate it is quite outside us and our theories don't affect it in any way. Just as climate must be endured and children kept amused, the poem as a Fact must be dressed up sometimes and sent to the Zoo—to get rid of it. It is part of the ritual of endurance merely. That is the only explanation for *Personal Landscape* now. People say that writing Poetry is one of the only non-Gadarene occupations left—but this is only another theory or aspect. Poems are Facts, and if they don't speak for themselves it's because they were born without tongues.

L. D.

**Aegean Islands. 1940-1941.**

Where white stares, smokes or breaks,  
Thread white, white of plaster and of foam.  
Where sea like a wall falls;  
Ribbed, lionish coast,  
The stony islands which blow into my mind  
More often than I imagine my grassy home;

To sun one's bones beside the  
Explosive, crushed-blue, nostril-opening sea  
(The weaving sea, splintered with sails and foam,  
Familiar of famous and deserted harbours,  
Of coins with dolphins on and fallen pillars.)

To know the gear and skill of sailing,  
The drenching race for home and the sail-white houses,  
Stories of Turks and smoky ikons,  
Cry of the bagpipe, treading  
Of the peasant dancers;

The dark bread  
The island wine and the sweet dishes;  
All these were elements in a happiness  
More distant now than any date like 40.  
A. D. or B. C., ever can express.

Bernard SPENCER.

## Greek Excavations.

Over the long-shut house  
Which earth, not keys kept under watch,  
I prod with a stick and down comes rattling soil  
Into the dug out room;  
And pottery comes down,  
Hard edges of drinking vessels, jars for oil,  
Mere kitchen stuff, rubbish of red or brown,  
Stubble of conquests  
—And I suddenly discover this discovered town.

The wish of the many, their abused trust,  
Blows down here in a little dust,  
So much unpainted clay :  
The minimum wish  
For the permanence of the basic things of a life,  
For children and friends and having enough to eat  
And the great key of a skill;  
The life the generals and the bankers cheat.

Peering for coin or confident bust  
Or vase in bloom with the swiftness of horses,  
My mind was never turned the way  
Of the classic of the just and the unjust.  
I was looking for things which have a date,  
And less of the earth's weight,  
When I broke this crust.

Bernard SPENCER.



**Delos.**

Wealth came by water to this farmless island ;  
Dolphins with backs like bows swim in mosaic  
Floors where the Greek sea-captains piled up money ;  
And the jagged circular patterns spin with the rush of  
The impetus and fling of waves.

Steps go down to the port. And in this area  
You could buy corn and oil or men and women.  
Above on the windy hill Leto the human  
Bore her birth pains, gave two gods to a legend  
Glittering and loveless like the sea.

Slavery, we know, was not of the market only.  
Here specially were rich and poor, priests and their pennies  
Imperial slavery we know. But the salt Aegean  
Rolled waves of flame and killing, quarrels of aliens,  
Till life here burst and was quiet.

In the boulevards of these dead you will think of violence,  
Holiness and violence, violence of sea that is bluer  
Than blue eyes are ; violence of sun and its worship ;  
Of money and its worship. And it was here by the breakers  
That strangers asked for the truth.

**Bernard SPENCER.**



### The White Country.

Time, like snow, blurs the clear shapes of things;  
And drifting even on our hands  
Obscures the gesture and intent.  
We do not know the landmarks any more,  
Cannot tell what people we once were.  
Like ghosts we wander in our tracks,  
Carrying dimmed intentions  
Through the still white country.  
If it were possible  
To take a bearing and be gone  
We should have found a way to go;  
We should have left long since.  
But Time, like snow, drifts everywhere,  
Mantles the beating heart;  
You see there's nothing here,  
Nothing but the white fields;  
And we can never leave.

Robin FEDDEN.

**Personal Landscape.**

I cannot disentangle your arms  
From the body of the day that is breaking.  
Light falls on lids now, gently as your hands,  
The limpid sky is something lost of yours  
And waves are sounds you hear in sleep.  
Smooth is the sand we trod last night  
And very soft the contours of the hill.

Robin FEDDEN.

## Camp on the Red Sea.

Under a pale rinsed sky  
I stamp my feet and feel the blood uncurl,  
Wait the taut physical dawn  
Across an opal sea.  
Standing among the lidded sleepers  
I endeavour to remember former travellers,  
Moses and his rabble, the Arab conquerors,  
Meticulous men with watered camels  
On botanical quests, and in the dawn  
A Jesuit blowing on sensitive fingers,  
Assemani the Vatican librarian.

Sanctus Antonius, tormented through the darkness,  
Bowed to Christ in the clear rinsed sky,  
And Granger by the first light noted gum trees,  
Viscous desert growth. But dawns are unrepeated  
And no two suns the same : I late comer  
Miss that fervour, only share the view,  
Not stumbling out to grope for manna,  
Not gripping sword or making notes,  
Got by Time beyond climacteric,  
Late addition to the lasting scene.

Robin FEDDEN.

### Letter from a Greek Poet.

“We are going backwards to spring between strong winds and extraordinary thunderstorms. There are nights when I wake with the feeling that I am a golden fish in a bottle of electric liquid. It is an atmosphere of sick childhoods; stimulating with dryness, stimulating in a bad way. I am trying to write whatever I can from limericks to metaphysical poems. I think that limerick writing is a good exercise for lonely men and suppose that the genre has been created in England because all of you are lonely, like islands. But the interesting thing is that it brings forth a sort of individual mythology.”

G. SEFERIS *from Pretoria.*



### To Argos.

The roads lead southward, blue  
Along a circumference of snow,  
Identified now by the scholars  
As a home for the cyclops, a habitation  
For nymphs and ancient appearances.  
Only the shepherd in his cowl  
Who walks upon them really knows  
The natural history in a sacred place ;  
Takes like a text of stone  
A familiar cloud-shape or fortress,  
Pointing at what is mutually seen,  
His dark eyes wearing the crowsfoot.

Our idols have been betrayed  
Not by the measurement of the dead ones  
Who are lying under these mountains,  
As under England our own fastidious  
Heroes lie awake, but do not judge.  
Winter rubs at the ice like a hair,  
Dividing time ; and a single tree  
Reflects here a mythical river.  
Water limps on ice, or scribbles  
On doors of sand its syllables,  
All alone, in an empty land, alone.  
This is what breaks the heart.

We say that the blood of Virgil  
Grew again in the scarlet pompion,  
Everafterwards reserving the old poet  
Memorials in his air, his water; so  
In this land one encounters always  
Agamemnon, Agamemnon; the voice  
Of water falling on hair in caves,  
The stonebreaker's hammer on walls,  
A name held closer in the circles  
Of bald granite than even these cyclamen,  
Like childrens' ears attentive here,  
Blown like glass from the floors of snow.

Truly, we the endowed who pass here,  
With the assurance of visitors in rugs,  
Can raise from the menhir no ghost  
By the cold sound of English idioms.  
Our true parenthood rests with the eagle,  
We recognise him turning over his vaults.  
Bones have no mouths to smile with,  
From the beds of companionable rivers dry.  
The modern girls pose on a tomb smiling :  
Night watches us on the western horn :  
The hyssop and the vinegar have lost their meaning,  
And this is what breaks the heart.

Lawrence DURRELL.

### To Ping-Ku, Asleep.

You sleeping child asleep, away  
Between the confusing world of forms  
The lamplight and the day. You lie  
And an ocean flows through you like glass,  
Asleep, in the body of the nautilus.

Between comparison and sleep,  
Lips that move in quotation;  
The turning of a small blind mind  
Like a plant, everywhere ascending.  
Our love has become a beanstalk.

Invent a language where the terms  
Are smiles; someone in the house now  
Only understands warmth and cherish,  
Still twig-bound, learning to fly.

This hand exploring the world makes  
The diver's deep-sea fingers on the sills  
Of underwater windows; all the wrecks  
Of our world where the sad blood leads back  
Through memory and sense like divers working.

Sleep, my dear, we won't disturb  
You, lying in the zones of sleep.  
The four walls symbolise love put about  
To hold in silence which so soon brims  
Over into sadness : its still dark.

Sleep, and rise a lady with a flower  
Between your teeth and a cypress  
Between your thighs : surely you won't ever  
Be puzzled by a poem or disturbed by a poem  
Made like fire by the rubbing of two sticks?

Lawrence DURRELL.

«Je est un autre.»

He is the man who makes notes,  
The observer in the tall black hat,  
Face hidden in the brim :  
In three European cities  
He has watched me watching him.

The street-corner in Buda and after  
By the post office a glimpse  
Of the disappearing tails of his coat,  
Gave the same illumination, spied upon,  
The tightness in the throat.

Once too meeting by the Seine,  
The waters a moving floor of stars.  
He had vanished when I reached the door,  
But there on the pavement burning,  
Lay one of his familiar black cigars.

The meeting on the dark stairway  
Where the tide ran clean as a loom :  
The betrayal of her, her kisses  
He has witnessed them all : often  
I hear him laughing in the next room.

He watches me now, working late,  
Bringing a poem to life, his eyes  
Reflect the malady of de Nerval :  
O useless in this old house to question  
The mirrors, his impenetrable disguise.

Lawrence DURRELL.



## REVIEW.

*Poems by Terence Tiller (Hogarth Press).*

*Influences* (strong) : Metaphysicals, ancient and modern ; Yeats ; Auden ; Eliot.

*Influences* (weak) : Hopkins ; de la Mare ; Dylan Thomas ; Cambridge sensuous school—  
e. g. Prokosch. Freud.

*Influences* (occasional) : the English Classics ; self.

Influences on the whole absorbed rather than imitated—masters, not models—but occasional lapses from this ideal, especially in direction of Auden. Personal, internal, experience stronger influence than objective, pathic experience. Personal symbolism pervasive but translatable.

### *Weaknesses :*

See above, and deduce. E. g. : tendency to mix techniques ; tendency towards secretiveness rather than obscurity in admissible sense ; tendency towards various forms of sentimentality disguised in poetic rhetoric rather than in poetry ; self-consciousness ; still signs of experimenting towards a style, and some poems only various efforts to say same thing ; frequent lack of anything very conclusive to say ; small variety of mood.

### *Merits :*

Music ; sense of form ; some sensitiveness ; the few merits of the weaknesses, as merits have perhaps their own defects ; imaginative intellectual and emotional content, when present ; a few new things to say, a number of new and interesting images ; very occasionally, the "inevitable" line ; phrase-making, dangerously barren though it may become ; some signs of original manner, and of objective breadth of range and interest showing through personal obsession, but slight.

### *Observations :*

Not a very flexible style, so tendency to translate rather than to absorb. Immediate sensory image often blurred by symbolic or allegorical use ; in this respect, colour-sense strong, shape-sense weak, panoramic perception weak. Strong (symbolic-emotional) interest in animals and landscapes, but seldom communicated to reader, because tends to fade away into interest in own reactions. This, if a fault, is a general fault throughout the poems. Promise, yes ; some achievement, yes ; but both a little vague and absent-minded.

TERENCE TILLER.

Robin Fedden, Bernard Spencer and Lawrence Durrell, have decided to produce PERSONAL LANDSCAPE, a memorandum-book, consisting of 16 pages of verse and notes. It will appear every two or three months, and will be sold privately. If you are interested you can obtain a copy by writing to Bernard Spencer 27 Sharia Malika Farida Cairo. Each copy costs 5 piastres; if you would care to subscribe to two or three issues at a time it would help us.